

# The Times of the Americas

The Newspaper That Covers Latin America and the Caribbean

Vol. XXXV, No. 4

Published biweekly, Washington, D.C.

Domestic: \$1.00/Canada: C\$1.50/International: \$1.85

February 20, 1991

## ARTS & CULTURE

*Americas Society mounts exhibit in New York*

### New Chilean artists on display

By Caroline Udall

*Special to The Times of the Americas*

The paucity of U.S. attention to Chilean art is something Americas Society Visual Arts Director Fatima Bercht is hoping to correct. Bercht is curator of an exhibition at the Americas Society of New York City titled "Contemporary Art from Chile" (Feb. 7-April 26), one of an ongoing series of exhibitions focusing on recent developments in contemporary art in Latin America.

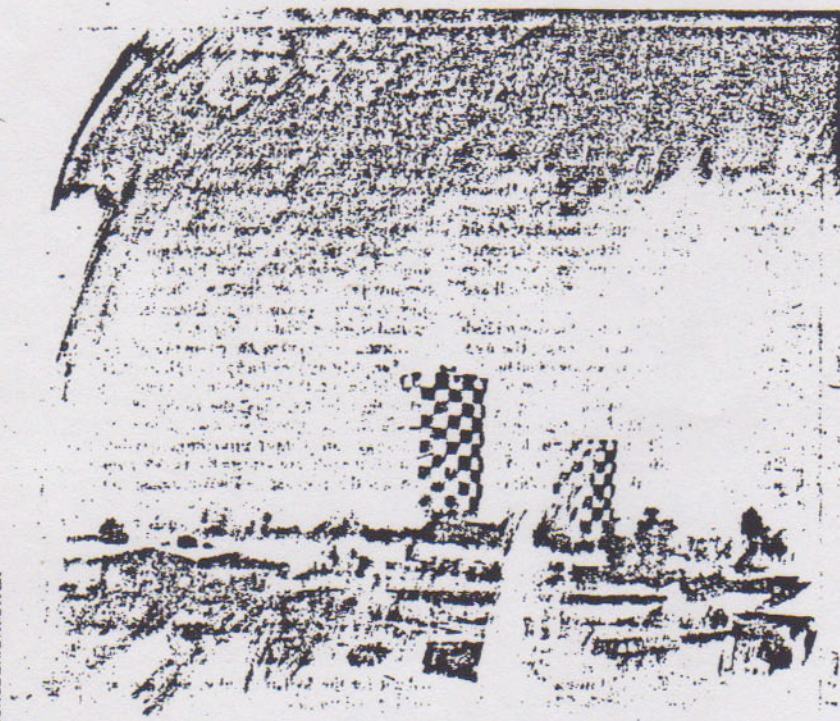
The exhibit is the first museum-quality exhibition of contemporary Chilean art in the United States in over a decade.

Knowledge of Chilean art in the United States is based on artists who have established an international profile and have long since left Chile, such as Roberto Matta and Claudio Bravo.

But for this exhibit, Bercht chose instead to focus on trends and directions of the artists working in the South American country. Such a focus, in Chile as elsewhere, can be somewhat difficult to narrow, as "there is really a lot going on." All artists in this exhibit were chosen because their work is representative of current forms of artistic expression in Chile today.

From about 1977 on, there have been a number of Chilean artists trying unorthodox approaches, such as performance art, or street events. While the experimental vein is still being mined, Bercht found that in Santiago—the major cultural center for visual arts in Chile—there is a very strong commitment to painting, particularly among younger artists.

Overall, Bercht found the contemporary scene in Santiago to be "surprisingly figurative. There is very little abstraction going on as compared to other countries." The figurative tradition—the tradition of the Spanish academy—remains strong in Chile, where it has been deeply ingrained since the 19th century.



**THE WATERTOWER**—From Enrique Zamudio's Santiago photo-pictographs: "Landscapes from the Camera Obscura," 1988-1989, photoemulsion and oil on canvas, 80 x 90 cm. each. Courtesy of the Americas Society.

The Chilean artists on exhibit work largely in a figurative but conceptual tradition, producing non-commercial forms of art. They belong to no particular movement and represent no "group" at all, some of them never even having met. Reflecting the diverse and dynamic situation in contemporary Chilean art, Gonzalo Diaz, Virginia Errazuriz, Gonzalo Mezza, Alicia Villarreal and Enrique Zamudio utilize a wide range of approaches, including installations (the mean-

ingful arrangement of objects in space) and serial imagery.

Photography especially is an element all five artists incorporate as a form for thinking and for exploring questions of art and the nature of the reality it seeks to depict. In Villarreal's "Through the Eyes of My Camera" (1987), for example, the artist uses the gallery walls to project images of everyday objects photographed in unusual ways or from unusual perspectives. She even juxtaposes those images

with some of the real objects. The work can be seen, says Bercht, as reflective of "a big discussion" that has taken place in Chile on the role of photography in art.

In Zamudio's controversial series of photographic paintings of public monuments and areas in Santiago (which are projected onto canvas and retouched in selected areas with paint), the works attempt to develop a social and political history of the city of Santiago and

define what constitutes an artistic image.

The intellectual exploration of artistic questions—such as the role of the artist in an industrial society, developing novel ways of working with space and creating a new artistic vocabulary—is in fact the only unifying feature of these artists, and this trend is more manifest in Chile than in Argentina or Venezuela.

"There are numerous elements of discourse going on in Chile," Bercht explains.

Another concern of these artists is developing non-traditional support for the arts. This concept is most probably born out of the hard reality of the Chilean art market, which is very small compared to that of other Latin American countries. The Chilean artistic community tends to be poor and isolated, and there are few institutional supports such as museums or galleries. All five featured artists support themselves in other ways, as university art professors or commercial or graphic artists.

*Ms. Udall is a free-lance writer based in Washington, D.C.*

JORGE BRANTMAYER